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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL EZ
SUBJECT: TSA ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR GRANT VISITS PRAGUE TO EXAMINE CZECH PREPAREDNESS FOR A TERRORIST ATTACK

¶1. (SBU) Summary. TSA Assistant Administrator Nicholas Grant recently visited Prague to discuss the lessons learned in the simulated terrorist attack on Prague's public transportation system on September 22. Grant found a sophisticated and competent emergency response system, but identified some jurisdictional issues that need to be worked out between GOCR authorities and the City of Prague. End summary.

¶2. (U) In the wake of the July terrorist attacks in London, Czech Prime Minister Jiri Paroubek ordered a complete simulation of a similar attack in Prague in order to assess and improve Czech capabilities to respond to such an attack. The simulation took place on September 22 and featured three nearly simultaneous challenges: a subway bombing, a train bombing between stations on the outskirts of Prague, and a suspicious package containing a bomb at a train station in the city. The simulation took place overnight to minimize disruption to the city.

¶3. (SBU) On October 3, TSA Assistant Administrator Grant met with a national official from the Fire & Rescue Service of the Czech Ministry of Interior to discuss the simulation. Deputy Fire Service Director Vaclav Muchna described the three attack scenarios. The largest was an explosion in a subway car 41 meters underground. Two hundred passengers were present, with 15 dead and 39 seriously wounded. All wounds were graphically depicted using techniques similar to those used in the motion picture industry. Wounded passengers were played by medical students to ensure symptoms were simulated accurately. In the midst of the response to this scenario, the next attack was announced: authorities learned that a suspicious package had been found at a train station, forcing responders to manage an evacuation and a bomb disposal operation while responding to the initial subway attack. Just as the national integrated emergency response system brought extra assets from surrounding regions into the city to assist, the exercise managers announced the third attack: a train had exploded in one of the areas just depleted of responders. Those arriving on the scene found a train car (which had actually been blown up for the exercise) filled with 22 "dead" passengers and many more wounded.

¶4. (SBU) Assistant Administrator Grant also met with a city official, Prague Assistant Mayor Michal Kopecky, to discuss the city's participation in the exercise. Kopecky said that City Hall officials felt the simulation was not sufficiently realistic because it did not include much of the decision-making the city would be responsible for in a real crisis. He explained that Prague has an emergency response operations center, which is integrated into several CCTV systems across the city. In a real crisis, Kopecky claimed, the city would be in charge, and would be directing the large scale efforts to engage the public and minimize the impact of the attacks. (Comment: Fire Service personnel had acknowledged that these areas were not part of the exercise plan, but cited the Prime Minister's short three-week planning cycle for the exercise as the primary reason for this omission. They indicated that the normal planning cycle was six months. End comment).

¶5. (SBU) Lessons learned. The Czech emergency integrated response system performed well, even when faced with challenges deliberately designed to undermine it. Fire Service, Police, and Ambulance units are accustomed to working together on a daily basis, and the increased tempo of the exercise did not expose weaknesses in this area. The national emergency communications system allowed the emergency services to draw units from regions around Prague to cover the third train explosion, allowing units that had been sent into the center of Prague to concentrate all of their efforts on the task they had been given. The Czech standard operating procedure for an explosion is to do an initial sweep for chemical or nuclear material before allowing medical personnel to enter the area. In each case, this sweep was completed in about six minutes. The only major unpredicted outcome was the inability of rescue services to restart subway station escalators on battery power after electric power was cut by the explosion. As a result, rescuers had to carry the wounded to the surface by hand, and a firefighter suffered a non-fatal heart attack after his

second trip with a stretcher. Assistant Administrator Grant was impressed with the detailed planning, realism, and complexity of the exercise, as well as the selection of problematic mass transit target scenarios. Although the response was considered a success, the exercise identified a lack of understanding between national and city officials as to who would control the response effort in the event of an actual terror attack in Prague.

¶6. (SBU) Assistant Administrator Grant believes the lessons learned from this exercise, as well as similar exercises in other countries, are useful for improving and developing U.S. homeland preparedness, response programs, and exercises. Assistant Administrator Grant is available to discuss his findings from this visit. He can be contacted by phone at 703-601-3101; or by e-mail at nicholas.grant@tsa.dhs.sgov.gov (classified), or Nick.Grant@dhs.gov (unclassified). Director Grant has cleared this cable.
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